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SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE POLICY-MAKING PROCESS

A TRADITIONAL NOVEL INTERACTION

by

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i

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Biography

Col. Marco Lant is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. He joined the Italian Air Force in 1990 and graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1994. He holds a Bachelor in Aeronautical Science from the "Federico II" University of Naples. He earned his pilot wings in 1995 at the ENJJPT at Sheppard AFB; he has about 3,700 flying hours in the T-37, T-38, PA-200 Tornado, and MB-339 PAN aircraft. On January 1996, he was assigned to the 154th FBS Squadron on Tornadoes. He then joined the Italian Aerobatic Demonstration Team "Frecce Tricolori" where he served as Wingman, Leader and, ultimately, as Commander, representing the Italian Air Force in more than 240 displays in 30 countries. He has since served in the Italian Air Force Staff Logistic Department.

Abstract

Social media is a new model of interaction that is having an unanticipated and rapidly evolving effect on the political and social landscape of the world. Emphasis on and discussion about the use and role of social media accompanies many of today's ongoing debates, introducing a new variable into the policy-making process. The widespread impression is that the growth of social media can play an influential role in the policy-making process. But while extensive research continuously monitors the effects of social media, a closer review of current statistics and analysis suggests the need to reevaluate its relation to the policy-making process. Audiences are largely becoming more and more skeptical about information carried by social networks. The lack of trust reveals and reflects the same attitude generally reserved for traditional media, relegating social media to a mere gauge of public opinion. The direct value of and effects between social media and the policy-making process are extremely difficult to assess, because of both the complexity of interactions and the number of concurring factors. Ultimately, despite the emphasis on the phenomenon, social media's role in the policy-making process appears to be generally overstated as social networks seem unable to bring a dramatic change in its dynamics. However, because of the lack of definite evidence and given the magnitude of the phenomenon, the effects of social media cannot be discarded *a priori*. Innovation brought by social media is likely to increase the tendency to scrutinize every aspect of the public policy-making process, which might eventually induce policy makers to face the necessity of engaging social networks in their deliberative process.

Introduction

Social media is a new model of interaction that brings unanticipated changes to the world's political and social landscape. The reach of social media affects many aspects of daily life and, according to a recent NATO research panel, blurs "many public and private boundaries."[1] Social media offers nearly real time access to a large range of opinions and connections; audiences have direct access to raw material and niche-analysis rather than depending on mainstream news, and they can directly express their views in response to this vast amount of information. Emphasis on and discussion about the use and role of social media accompanies many of today's ongoing debates, introducing a new variable into the policy-making process. In such processes, actors increasingly regard social networks as an innovative element capable of bringing a dramatic change to the legacy paradigm of communication. The widespread impression is that the growth of social media can play an influential role in the policy-making process.

But while extensive research continuously monitors the effects of social media, a closer review of current statistics and analysis suggests the need to reevaluate its potential relation to the policy-making process. Such analysis often reveals how the dynamics of social media carry their own misconceptions, and the abundance of information circulating across social networks is generally far from being considered reliable. Furthermore, on the usage of social media, surveys indicate that the majority of the time spent on social networks is dedicated to maintaining a relationship with individuals in the same network. Discussions regarding political, geopolitical, environmental, and social issues represent only a small part of everyday interactions. Even when politicians directly engage social media or when it serves as a collection-point for user-generated content, assessing its actual influence on the policy-making process remains problematic.

Thesis

Ultimately, despite the tendency of current narratives to encompass considerations of social media and its effects, there is no convincing evidence about the influence of social media on the policy-making process. Audiences are largely becoming more and more skeptical about information carried by social networks, and this lack of trust reveals and reflects the same attitude generally reserved for traditional media, relegating social media to a mere gauge of public opinion. However, because of this inconclusive evidence, the novel dynamics introduced by social networks cannot be discarded *a priori*. Innovation brought by social media is likely to increase the tendency to scrutinize every aspect of the public policy-making process, which might eventually induce policy makers to face the necessity of engaging social networks in their deliberative process.

This paper considers the relationship between social media and policy-making by defining social media, reviewing its characteristics, describing its relationship with the policy-making environment, and analyzing its interaction with the policy-making process. Subsequently, the analysis considers surveys about the use of social media, and the risks associated with assessing social media's relevance. The study focuses on the national interest level and does not investigate local dynamics. The research sources come from different areas of interest and include papers and analysis from the fields of business, social studies, academics, policy, and diplomacy.

Social media definition and characteristics

Social media is defined here as "the technologies, applications, and methods that facilitate cyber interaction by enabling users to participate in, comment on, and create content as a means of communicating with people in their existing social network, other users, and the public."[2] Social media is then a combination of technologies, information, and interaction processes. It operates across the internet, which is a consolidated global phenomenon and whose dynamics are subject to a significant shift from being a static and individual related approach to a more dynamic, interactive, and collective experience among its users.[3]

To fully appreciate the impact of social networks one must consider the way in which they represent a revolutionary, worldwide, and fast growing phenomenon. George Patterson maintains that, despite having been popular for quite some time, social media "has taken many in business, government and the general populace by surprise."[4] There is no question about it being widespread; the novel factor resides in how it is reshaping the way people communicate, conduct business, and establish a relationship between individuals and organizations.

The magnitude of the phenomenon

Leaving aside any analysis of its interactions, social media is relevant because of the magnitude of the phenomenon. According to Deirdre Bannon of the Nielsen Company, "social media and social networking are no longer in their infancy," as in little more than two decades they have continued to grow, providing today's worldwide users with innovative and powerful ways to engage with people, events, and organization of their choice.[5] More than 2.7 billion people are connected to the internet, and that figure represents nearly 40 percent of the world's population.[6] Recent social media statistics report that Facebook, for example, has an average of 727 million daily active users, approximately 20 percent of those being inside the United States

and Canada.[7] The dynamics of how users connect to their network are also evolving, and while personal computers remain the center of reference of most individual networking experiences, users are increasingly exploiting new technologies such as mobile phones and tablets, and the significant surge in connectivity allows them to be online anytime and anywhere.[8] Time spent on dedicated mobile social networking applications accounts for more than a third of social networking time across personal computers and mobile devices.[9] Almost half of the users access social media via their smartphones, while one quarter does so using a tablet.[10]

Analysis of social media demographics shows that the highest percentages of users are between the ages of 18 and 44.[11] However, as a social medium matures, so does its population, shifting to older users, and the average age of an adult user has increased from 33 years in 2008 to 38 in 2010.[12] As far as gender, among all users, women (56 percent) tend to use social media platforms more than men (44 percent) do.[13]

The diverse, evolving, and vast online population represents a phenomenon that cannot be underestimated. However, the sheer scale of social networks alone is insufficient to define its significance; rather its size must be taken into account in order to evaluate its impact to policy making.

The geographical spread

Geographically, the spread of online users highlights substantial disparities. According to the UN International Telecommunication Union, 41 percent of the world's households are connected to the internet.[14] Worldwide, 59 percent of the households are not connected to the internet, and of that share, 90 percent are in the developing world. Europe has the highest percentage of connections (77 percent), while Africa the lowest (around 7 percent).[15] In the Americas, the majority of households are connected to the internet (61 percent), while in the

Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific around one third of households are connected.[16] Recent analysis describes interaction patterns among social networks with respect to their geographical location. A study about Twitter's connectivity patterns reveals that users preferentially exchange information within their own country; however, more than a third of all links are exchanged across national boundaries, though interconnection favors neighboring countries and areas of a common language.[17] These patterns may limit the global reach of social media to affect policy making at the international level.

The platforms

Connections occur on a number of social networks that consumers can choose from. Together with "traditional" social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, a growing number of sites and services include some form of social feature or integration in their design.[18] The speed of social networks' evolution facilitates the proliferation of different platforms; however, it must be highlighted that emphasis is on the network, rather than on any given platform. Nicholas Cull maintains that "the digital world evolves too fast to become too attached to any one technology […] the network, however, is here to stay."[19]

To summarize, aside from any given platform or social connection feature, a vast and increasingly growing number of interconnections have created social networks that have become integral component of the user's lifestyle.

Social media and policy-making process – Environment

With increased connectivity, increasingly larger audiences migrate online, and social media exerts a pervasive effect on those who are connected. Today, overall, social networks encompass a gigantic selection of individuals, relations, and opinions, and the array of interactions extends over both private and public domains. An emphasis on social media

accompanies many current debates, injecting a new variable into the policy-making process.[20]

Governments, organizations, and individuals make decisions through such processes with the

aim of inducing a behavioral change.[21] Making policy often involves reaching a compromise

among multiple competing actors and interests to achieve the desired policy outcome. According

to the Pew Research Center, social media is affecting, and potentially transforming, the

relationship between the elements of the policy-making process, creating a new environment in

which users are more politically engaged.[22] Park June maintains that in the new environment,

"rather than depending on mass media to get policy information, people can now directly express

their views to politicians and civil servants" on any social media platform.[23] Questioning and

judging the quality of policy decisions is now direct as opposed to indirect; furthermore,

audiences can spontaneously generate issues and propagate them via social networks,

transforming public opinion from a passive into an active and interactive entity.

Public opinion: from an indirect approach to a direct approach

Social media has enabled people to gather a vast amount of information from the

network. Nicholas Cull describes how accessing information occurs within a "horizontal peer-to-

peer network rather than through the old vertical process by which information flowed down

from the traditional sources of media authority."[24] Given the volume of the network, the amount

of information available has developed beyond its original framework. Today, the media

landscape is dominated by the 24-hour news machine. Unprecedented levels of interactivity have

been developed and, according to Conrad Bird, "older, more established communication

techniques simply cannot deliver in this modern environment."[25] Social media has empowered

individuals with the capability to affect the information cycle by directly acquiring, assembling,

and transferring information. Additionally, increasingly smaller, faster, and cheaper hardware

has transformed users into providers, bringing improvised reporters to relay raw, albeit uncorroborated, information directly from the scene.[26]

Public participation: "prosumer" audiences

Through the empowerment of individuals with the capability to provide real time and continuous information, social media has allowed the creation of vast groups with the ability to gather and present issues and opinions. Tanja Aitamurto explains that such processes, known as "crowdsourcing," have long been used by companies "to gather ideas for product development and to sense trends among users."[27] Aggregated users on social media represent a global audience and, according to Nicholas Cull, their combined identities become "inherently more powerful […] especially as they connect across networks."[28] Such groups, in some cases, may form a collective intelligence in which knowledge is most accurate because it consists of inputs from a distributed population.[29] Even though some local governments are experimenting with crowdsourcing to gain greater citizen participation, the process can also independently generate opinions aimed at achieving influence over the traditional policy-making process.[30]

The awareness of policy makers

Given the level of interaction and the spread of the phenomenon, social media has reached a critical mass of users that cannot be ignored, and a communication strategy aimed only at a few groups and channeled only through traditional media will necessarily fall short.[31] However, according to Bruce Gregory, in the policy-making process, social networks are still considered to be "new ways to perform traditional functions."[32] Today, the push among public agencies is toward achieving greater awareness of social media's impact.[33] The raising consciousness of the potential of social media leads to the need for closer analysis of the interaction between social networks and the policy-making process.

Social media and policy-making process – Interactions

The characteristics of the phenomenon are capable of exerting pressure on the policy-making process, and policy makers are increasingly aware of the impact of social media in the broad spectrum of so-called soft power.[34] A novel narrative must then be created in which credibility becomes a competitive issue, as Joseph Nye suggests, if "the world of traditional power politics was typically about whose military or economy wins, in the information age power is also about whose story wins."[35] Policy makers should develop dedicated strategies and capabilities to be relevant in the new scenario and to adapt to increased social media literacy. The relationship between policy makers and social media requires a shift from the current reactive approach toward a more proactive one.

Direct pressure on the policy-making process

Public opinion has always influenced policy makers and, although it is often publically denied, opinions and polls can affect and, in some cases, determine the policy maker's approach to the issue.[36] Social media has changed the paradigm of how public opinion is conveyed to policy makers: it has introduced a sort of constant survey, a persistent inquiry about the decision-making process. Traditionally, mainstream media gather opinions and present them in disciplined and coordinated groups. In contrast, social networks collect undisciplined opinion and "real-time polls" that are not conveyed through a traditional process. Brian Hocking maintains that they generate instead "multidirectional flows that are not directly aimed at policy elites, although the ultimate goal will often be to influence elite attitudes and policy choices."[37] However, according to Clay Shirky, social networks "can compensate for the disadvantages of undisciplined groups by reducing the costs of coordination" and allowing them to reorganize and concentrate their opinions in some sort of collective action.[38]

Therefore, given such potentials, the impression is that policy makers must manage the effects of social media and broaden their engagement with social networks.[39] The shift in the communication paradigm and the increased awareness of the effects of coordinated and concentrated opinions may well offer new opportunities in terms of policy development. Evan Potter suggests that online collaboration and deliberation among policy makers and between them and citizens could address "cross-national policy challenges such as resource competition, sustainable development, and interethnic conflict."[40] In today's debates, social networks may enhance dynamic interactions between citizens and policy makers, creating opportunities for direct information delivery and exchange.

At the same time, engaging social media involves selecting channels and platforms, and creating dedicated content. Different tools target different audiences, in terms of both the social spectrum and geographical spread.[41] Defining media as "social" implies a conversational style, in which some personal aspect is necessarily present, and in which information should be formatted to be easy to read, use, and understand. The aim is to create sensitive and dedicated content capable of compelling users to return again and again.

Moving beyond reaction

The default tendency in official organizations and governments has been to generate social media messages to advocate their policies.[42] Advocacy comes at the end of the decision-making process, when the need arises to promote and support the desired outcome. Should feedback to policy decisions not meet expectations, then the system reacts and either discloses additional information to contextualize the decision, or generates different objectives. A reactive attitude limits the range of options; social networks can actually limit them once strong opinions

have been voiced on certain issues, and ignoring leading trends may cost significant political capital.

At the diplomatic level, government agencies display an increasing awareness of the potential of social media. Recent public diplomacy strategies attempt to move beyond the advocacy approach by acknowledging the possibility of online dialogue to mutual benefit.[43] More than any other US agency, the State Department has officially engaged social media with so-called e-diplomacy, recognizing that "the evolution of the web and the evolution of public diplomacy are intertwined."[44] Although at present e-diplomacy has a defined structure and vision, its role and effectiveness with respect to traditional instruments of power have not yet been fully evaluated; Nicholas Cull maintains that "perhaps its greatest potential and closest fit is as a form of exchange diplomacy which, like social media, seeks to operate through networks and people-to-people connections."[45]

In order to coordinate multiple instruments of power, the military has always embedded, at some level, media reporting teams and individuals in its operations. Conflicts have been told through the eyes of journalists first and, by the first Gulf War, reports from military operations have become available on television news. Today, social media empowers anybody to expose the conditions in which military engagements are conducted, potentially leading to a global disclosure of secret information within minutes and, according to Airis Rikveilis, "no military campaign can be executed without at least some explanation of its purpose to both friendly and unfriendly audiences."[46] The activities of elements such as Public Affairs and Information Operations generally begin to operate much earlier than the eventual conduct of kinetic campaigns. In this context, social media may as well assume an even wider spectrum of use, as it can serve to sense the environment, spread propaganda, and exploit deception.

Social media and policy-making process – Surveys and risks

At some level, social media is present in the narrative of virtually every policy-making process. Given the magnitude and the dynamics of the phenomenon, the general perception is that it represents a potent element capable of influencing the process. Nevertheless, a comprehensive analysis must take into consideration surveys about the actual use of social media and the risks carried by social networks. Information discussed across social media should be carefully considered and weighed in order to gauge its quality, reliability, relevance, and accountability. Together with concerns about the information, consideration must be given to the value of social media interactions with respect to the policy-making process. The social media environment is mostly free from institutional control and can serve as an anonymous stage for every sort of discussion and disclosure producing a number of fluctuating opinions. Against such undesirable effects, policy makers worldwide are debating the issue of controlling the information circulating across the network. Finally, regardless of the strategy adopted about social media, assessing its effects proves to be an extremely problematic task.

Credibility, reliability, and accountability

The latest analysis reveals that more than half of internet users place quite a substantial amount of trust on the information provided by search engines.[47] On the other hand, 85 percent of the same users question the credibility of information on social networks, expressing doubts about the messages they carry.[48] These percentages highlight a controversial approach to user-generated information and it appears that, despite a strong engagement in social media, audiences tend to place their confidence in information endorsed and formatted by search engines. This represents a counter-trend to today's mainstream media, which draws increasingly from social networks to obtain real-time news, potentially leading to initial reports being flawed

by misinformation. In the restless 24-hour news cycle, timing is often traded for accuracy and, subsequently, according to Dennis Murphy "the distinction between new and mainstream media sources becomes blurred, leaving it to the reader, already bombarded with information, to distinguish fact from fiction."[49] Conflating social networks and traditional media suggests that audiences are beginning to approach both of them with the same attitude. When receiving and assessing information, credibility is critical across all types of media; credibility is often a function of identity, and identifying the source of information raises in turn an accountability issue.[50] Closing that disconnect means linking an identity to a specific user, and requires a deliberate consent from the individual. On the other hand, social networking bases its construct on an individual identity: creating a personal profile involves surrendering a certain degree of privacy in order to interact with other users. Anonymity can make it difficult for users to establish trust or earn credit for one's contributions.[51] Recently, the Department of Psychology of Pittsburg's Carnegie Mellon University, conducted a study over a small but significantly diverse group of participants, the findings exposed that half of them had sought anonymity through false profiles and identities for all sorts of purposes and interactions.[52] Sharing one's identity online reveals personal data to other users and third parties, and the problem then becomes "whether anonymity should be easier or more difficult to attain, and whether the usability of anonymity tools should be improved."[53]

Interactions value in the policy-making process

According to the Center for the Digital Future, 56 percent of social media users believe that interactions across social networks are important for maintaining their social relationships, and, in 2012, only 12 percent of online communities had a politically oriented nature.[54] While some authors maintain that access to information is politically far less important than access to

conversation, information quality and interaction value must still be considered.[55] As previously

mentioned, information quality is questioned in terms of credibility whereas interaction value

might be assessed in terms of usefulness. Recent studies confirm the omnipresent nature of social

media interactions, but at the same time suggest that their actual value remains an open issue.

Whereas significant percentages "believe social networking is important for maintaining their

relationships, even larger percentages [say] social networking sites are not important."[56]

Reviews on the role of the internet in the policy-making process highlight that the majority of

users consider the web "a tool for understanding political issues, but not to create more political

power for themselves."[57] Only a fraction of users relies on social networks as an instrument to

influence public officials, or to inject their issues into the policy-making process.[58] This suggests,

once more, that audiences confer an informative nature upon social media, not much different

from the nature of traditional media. Accordingly, social networks appear to be unsuitable as

policy-making tools; nevertheless, as other tools have done in the past (e.g., printing and the

postal service), they can function as a new coordinated communication system.

Social media and populism

As a novel communication system, social media gathers all sorts of opinions. Public

opinion is, by definition, volatile and fluctuating, and the speed of social networks exacerbates

this characteristic generating a number of non-uniform, chaotic, and contradictory opinions.

Trigger events can quickly spark debates, trends, and misconceptions. In October 2010,

Australian journalist Julian Assange leaked hundreds of thousands of messages, questioning the

credibility of governments' conduct. Social networks were flooded with unveiled insights and

estimates, as well as confidential reports about foreign countries' governments. Exposing such

classified data has been considered by some as a step toward total democracy, empowering

citizens with authentic and unbiased information.[59] Nevertheless, it might be considered that, at

the same time, disclosing restricted data has undermined the democratic system in three ways.

First, it has exacerbated an irresponsible journalism, making it keener to exploit out-of-context

raw data, leading to an easy distortion and politicization of the news. Second, it has created a

vast audience of voyeur-users unable to distinguish information from gossip. Finally, in

decontextualizing events, it has demoralized the conduct of the US and western democracies,

depicting a mendacious and vicious establishment disconnected from common expectations.[60]

Social networks have spread the arousing indignation with some positive effects on one side

(e.g., the Arab Spring) but on the other side they have fed populist impulses. Populism is far

from a synonym of democracy, and it leads inevitably to the radicalization and paralysis of any

debate, evoking the risk of an authoritarian drift.

Controlling the engagement

Social networks allow an abundance of information and social connections, which have

obvious advantages in terms of freedom of speech and association. Nevertheless, according to

Kristen Purcell, in western democracies the state's public speech is becoming increasingly

challenged by the "participatory news consumer," and its narrative is analyzed, compared, and

contrasted as the social media community accounts for anomalies.[61] In his analysis of political

power and social media, Clay Shirky maintains that such different perspectives and potential

debates among actors, poses for democracies a "conservative dilemma," which leads in turn to

two possible responses: censorship or propaganda.[62] Such a response stands in stark contrast with

the concept of internet freedom and resembles an instrumental use of media typical of an

authoritarian regime.[63] James Cowie maintains that, in a regime, the aim of political dissent is to

spread across social networks empowering users to organize and coordinate their efforts,

"attracting sympathetic attention of an engaged global audience."[64] Given such controversies, the question arises as to which measures liberal democracies will have to implement to safeguard freedom, promote their strategies, and, at the same time, deny authoritarian regimes the ability to propagandize deceptive realities.[65] The level of supervision over media content is an enduring debate, nevertheless, when related to social media, Joseph Nye believes that "too much government control, or even the appearance thereof, can undercut the credibility that such networks are designed to engender."[66]

Assessing the engagement

Assessing the effectiveness, however, of any strategy designed to influence social networks is a daunting challenge. Louise Vinter and David Knox maintain that the difficulties encompass the intrinsic long-term ambition, the intangible nature of any social measurement, and the problem of "correlating and attributing observable changes to one's own activities."[67] In policy making, attributing observable changes exclusively to social networks might be misleading. Policy issues are affected by many simultaneous actors and processes, and social media can be considered one of them; according to Colin Wilding, in such context, it becomes challenging to determine a precise and "meaningful chain of cause and effect."[68] In analyzing evaluation data, a comprehensive approach, which allows for evaluating long-term outcomes should be able to highlight some useful facts. However, even if little changes in behavior may be sufficient to demonstrate the contribution of a determined strategy, long-term effects are likely to be influenced by a number of other concurring factors.[69]

Conclusion

Social media and policy-making process – A traditional novel factor

Exploiting social networking capabilities allows for the flow of an unprecedented amount of information; indeed information has never been so free and accessible, allowing citizens to publicly and directly express their views and opinions. Joseph Nye maintains that the advantage of social networks in societies resides in their capability to access vast audiences while taking "advantage of two-way communications and peer-to-peer relations to overcome cultural differences."[70] Today, emphasis on the importance of social media as a tool in the policy-making process seems to allow all actors to affect the process itself by co-creating messages that spread across the network exploiting its structure and channels, and self-adapting to its peer-to-peer narrative.

However, when confronted with the challenge of assessing the relevance of such a novel approach, outcomes are still debatable and inconclusive. The credibility of unfiltered information provided by social networks is largely questioned. Lack of accuracy, volatility of opinion, sudden spurts of populism, and the omnipresent debate over government control contribute to foster increasing levels of distrust. In this context, assessing the direct value of and effects between social media and the policy-making process is extremely difficult, because of both the complexity of interactions and the number of concurring factors. Furthermore, surveys have monitored the perception of the role of the internet in politics, and findings are quite consistent throughout the years highlighting how social networks are usually considered a tool for understanding policy, but not for generating influence.[71]

Given that all the considerations about social media and the policy-making process are very similar to those historically reserved for traditional media, it may be suggested that, in the

end, there are not substantial differences between the two. Ultimately, despite the emphasis on the phenomenon, social media's role in the policy-making process appears to be generally overstated as social networks seem unable to bring a dramatic change to the dynamics of policy making.

However, because of the lack of definite evidence and given the magnitude of the phenomenon, the effects of social media cannot be discarded *a priori*. Some of the novel characteristics social networks embody, such as rapid and direct access to vast and heterogeneous audiences, could offer the potential for engagement as part of a contribution to overall broader strategies. It is highly probable that social networks will increasingly expose policy makers to direct public scrutiny and accountability, bringing domestic politics to a global scale, and increasing both their personal and professional risk calculus.[72] Traditionally, governments and officials have always been regarded as the most credible source of information. Today, however, audiences can access a vast amount of information and can exercise oversight, question, and check on a variety of subjects. As former secretary of state Hillary Clinton stated, "even in authoritarian countries, information networks are helping people discover new facts and making governments more accountable."[73] The open question is, however, who holds creators of social media accountable for the accuracy of their information without institutional safeguards, regulatory oversight, or the proverbial court of public opinion. In this context, policy makers might eventually have to truly deal with social networks from the early stages of the policy-making process. Raising preemptive awareness allows policy makers to adjust their decision-making process in order to align expectations and outcomes or, more explicitly, words and deeds, to achieve broad public support.[74] Entrusting social media to engage in the policy-making process implies losing a certain level of control over the message, but that represents a positive

long-term compromise in terms of credibility; as a matter of fact, imposing more stringent oversight in order to control the message would most likely result in a loss of trust.

Despite the lack of definite evidence on its effects and given the enormous volume of users, the level of discussion, and the growing commitment of agencies and organizations, it is unlikely that social media will be discarded anytime soon from the policy-making process. Paraphrasing Clay Shirky, indeed, the best practical reason to think that social media can contribute to bring a change is that both audiences and policy makers think they can.[75]

Notes

[1] NATO Science and Technology Organization, *Social Media: Risks and Opportunities in Military Applications*, HFM Panel on Social Media Risks and Opportunities in Military Applications, Executive Summary (Tallinn, Estonia: NATO STO, April 2012), 1, https://www.cso.nato.int/pubs/rdp.asp?RDP=RTO-MP-HFM-201 (accessed 11 November 2013).

[2] Ivy Estabrooke, and David J.Y. Combs, *Social Media Defining the Problem: A Research Perspective*, HFM Panel on Social Media: Risks and Opportunities in Military Applications (Tallinn, Estonia: NATO STO, April 2012), 2-2, https://www.cso.nato.int/pubs/rdp.asp?RDP=RTO-MP-HFM-201 (accessed 11 November 2013).

[3] Department of Defense, *The Use of Web 2.0 in the Department of Defense*, DoD CIO & Joint Staff J6 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, July 2009), 2-4, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/dod/use-of-web20-in-dod.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013). In such an evolving context, social media have become an attractive arena for agencies and organizations, which in general embrace them to socialize or market an organization's brand, product, or idea with participation from the public.

[4] George Patterson, *Analysis And Insights Review Of Social Media And Defense* (Y&R Australian Defense Force Culture, 2011), ix, http://www.defence.gov.au/pathwaytochange/docs/socialmedia/index.htm (accessed 23 November 2013).

[5] Deirdre Bannon, *The Social Media Report 2012* (New York, NY: The Nielsen Company, 2012), 2, http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/reports/2012/state-of-the-media-the-social-media-report-2012.html (accessed 23 November 2013).

[6] UN International Telecommunication Union, *ICT Facts and Figures 2013*, Telecommunication Development Bureau (Geneva, CH: International Telecommunication Union, February 2013), 2, http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx (accessed 23 November 2013).

[7] Facebook, *Newsroom*, Key-Facts, https://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts (accessed 23 November 2013). Monthly volume of active user as of September 30, 2013 has reached a peak of 1.19 billion.

[8] Jeff Smith and Dorothy Tse, *Getting Started with Mobile: What Marketers Need to Know* (New York: The Nielsen Company, 2013), 2, http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/reports/2013/whats-next--getting-started-with-mobile-what-marketers-need-to-k.html. In just four years, the share of smartphones in the US has risen from 18 percent to 62 percent of all mobile phones, driving feature phone share down to just 38 percent. Deirdre Bannon, *Social Media Report 2012*, 2. Time spent on mobile applications and the mobile web accounts for 63 percent of the year-over-year growth in overall time spent using social media.

[9] Deirdre Bannon, *Social Media Report 2012*, 6. Compared to 2011, consumers increased their social app time by 76 percent in 2012, spending more than seven times more minutes on apps than the mobile web.

[10] Ibid., 2.

[11] Ibid., 6.

[12] Keith N. Hampton, Lauren Sessions Goulet, Lee Rainie, and Kristen Purcell, "Social networking sites and our lives," *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project* (Washington: 16 June 2011), 8, http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media/Files/Reports/2011/PIPpercent20-percent20Socialpercent20networkingpercent20sitespercent20andpercent20ourpercent20lives.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013).

[13] Ibid., 10.

[14] UN International Telecommunication Union, *ICT Facts and Figures 2013*, 2. This figure represents 78 percent of the households in the developed world, while, in the developing world, the penetration has reached only 28 percent.

[15] Ibid., 3.

[16] Ibid. Growing rates are also geographically differentiated: between 2009 and 2013, Internet penetration in households has grown fastest in Africa, with annual growth of 27 percent, followed by 15 percent annual growth in Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States and the CIS.

[17] Juhi Kulshrestha, Farshad Kooti, Ashkan Nikravesh, and Krishna P. Gummadi, *Geographic Dissection of the Twitter Network* (Kaiserslautern, GE: Max Planck Institute for Software Systems, 2012), 8, http://www.mpi-sws.org/~farshad/geographic_dissection.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013).

[18] Jeff Bullas, "12 Awesome Social Media Facts and Statistics for 2013," *Jeff Bullas Blog*, http://www.jeffbullas.com/2013/09/20/12-awesome-social-media-facts-and-statistics-for-2013/#4HwCMQqMSoz5jdVH.99 (accessed 23 November 2013). Google Talk is becoming increasingly more popular, while the fastest growing western platform is Pinterest. As far as single account ownership, Chinese Tencent and Ren Ren come right after the most popular western sites and are the most popular Asian platforms.

[19] Nicholas J. Cull, "The Long Road to Public Diplomacy 2.0: The Internet in US Public Diplomacy," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, March 2013, 137, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/misr.12026/pdf (accessed 23 November 2013).

[20] Michael Hallsworth, Simon Parker and Jill Rutter, *Policy Making In The Real World* (London, UK: Institute for Government , April 2011), 22, http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Policypercent20making percent20inpercent20thepercent20realpercent20world.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013). Policy making can be defined as a process by which policy makers translate their political vision into programs and actions to deliver 'outcomes' – desired change in the real world.

[21] Conrad Bird, "Strategic Communication and Behavior Change: lessons from Domestic policy," in *Engagement: Public Diplomacy in a Globalized World,* ed. Jolyon Welsh and Daniel Fearn (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2008), 107, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/publications/Engagementpercent20book.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013). Influencing somebody else's behavior is the goal of many policy makers throughout the world, and a life's work for academics, social psychologists, think-tank researchers and an array of other professionals.

[22] Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, and Purcell, "Social networking sites and our lives," 40.

[23] Park June, "The Increasing Political Impact Of Social Media," *SERI Quarterly* (October 2011), 1, http://www.questia.com/library/1P3-2489311931/social-media-s-impact-on-policy-making (accessed 23 November 2013).

[24] Nicholas J. Cull, "The Internet in US Public Diplomacy," 136.

[25] Conrad Bird, "Strategic Communication and Behavior Change: lessons from Domestic policy," 109.

[26] Dennis M. Murphy, "Strategic Communication: Wielding The Information Element Of Power," in *Theory Of War And Strategy,* ed. J. Boone Bartholomees (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, July 2010), 153, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/download.cfm?q=1004 (accessed 23 November 2013). On the other hand, compared to traditional media, the inverted information cycle degrades the ability to control and verify information, preventing a positive identification and validation of the source.

[27] Tanja Aitamurto, *Crowdsourcing for Democracy: A New Era in Policy-Making* (Finland: Publication of the Committee for the Future, January 2012), 8, http://iisdb.stanford.edu/pubs/23963/Crowdsourcing_for_DemocracyF_www.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013).

[28] Nicholas J. Cull, "The Internet in US Public Diplomacy," 137.

[29] Pierre Levy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1997), 57.

[30] UN International Telecommunication Union, *M-Government: Mobile Technologies for Responsive Governments and Connected Societies* (Paris, FR: OECD Publishing, February 2011), 113, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264118706-en (accessed 23 November 2013).

[31] Nicholas J. Cull, "The Internet in US Public Diplomacy," 137.

[32] Bruce Gregory, "American Public Diplomacy: Enduring Characteristics, Elusive Transformation," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 6, 3-4 (2011), 370, http://resources.columbian.gwu.edu/upload/pub/2011/10/BGregory.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013).

[33] Dennis M. Murphy, "Wielding The Information Element Of Power," 154. For example, in the conduct of military conflicts, operations have been exposed to public scrutiny by an extraordinary amount of field reports generated by social media users. Platforms such as YouTube empower individuals to upload videos, without editorial oversight, and access a nearly unlimited audience; the uploaded content has sometimes the potential to generate unforeseeable strategic and political effects.

[34] Ferguson Hanson, *Revolution @State: The Spread of eDiplomacy* (Sidney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, March 2012), 17, http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/reports/2012/3/ediplomacypercent20hanson/03_ediplomacy_hanson (accessed 23 November 2013). At the diplomatic level, policy makers are, slowly but steadily, increasing their level of interaction with social media as a novel tool to

gauge tendencies, to address audiences with key messages, and to influence major online influencers.

[35] Joseph Nye, "The Pros and Cons of Citizen Diplomacy," *International Herald Tribune*, accessed November 30, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/05/opinion/05iht-ednye.html.

[36] Howard J. Wiarda, *Divided America on the World Stage: Broken Government and Foreign Policy* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books Inc. ,October 2009), 69.

[37] Brian Hocking, "Reconfiguring Public Diplomacy: From Competition To Collaboration," in *Engagement: Public Diplomacy in a Globalised World,* ed. Jolyon Welsh and Daniel Fearn (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2008), 66, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/publications/Engagementpercent20book.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013).

[38] Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media," *Foreign Affairs*, N.p., 20 Dec 2010, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67038/clay-shirky/the-political-power-of-social-media (accessed 23 November 2013).

[39] Hallsworth, Parker, and Rutter, *Policy Making In The Real World*, 62. Moreover, recent studies suggest that such engagement it should not be limited to simply widening the range of inputs, leading to a mere 'enhanced consultation' that ultimately would not have the power to influence the *status quo*.

[40] Evan H. Potter, "Web 2.0 And The New Public Diplomacy: Impact And Opportunities," in *Engagement: Public Diplomacy in a Globalised World,* ed. Jolyon Welsh and Daniel Fearn (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2008), 125, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/publications/Engagementpercent20book.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013).

[41] Ari-Matti Auvinen, "Social Media - The New Power Of Political Influence," *Centre for European Studies* (Brussels), http://thinkingeurope.eu/sites/default/files/publication-files/kansio-digital_democracy_-_final_en.pdf (accessed 10 November 2013). The approach to the communication style differs from traditional media as in the world of social media, there are many public and hidden codes of communication that users should know and control.

[42] Nicholas J. Cull, "The Internet in US Public Diplomacy," 136. In shaping international relations, Nicholas J. Cull maintains that it is not surprising that official diplomatic Twitter accounts have been used to push out messages rather than to create or enhance a community around the issue of interest to the United States.

[43] Ibid., 134.

[44] Ibid., 124.

[45] Ibid., 126.

[46] NATO Science and Technology Organization, *Social Media: Risks and Opportunities in Military Applications*, 1; Airis Rikveilis, *Practice of Social Media in Military: Success Undeniable, Future Uncertain – A View from Latvia*, HFM Panel on Social Media: Risks and Opportunities in Military Applications (Tallinn, Estonia: NATO STO, April 2012), 2, https://www.cso.nato.int/pubs/rdp.asp?RDP=RTO-MP-HFM-201 (accessed 11 November 2013).

[47] Center for the Digital Future, *The 2013 Digital Future Report,* USC Annenberg School (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 2013), 62, http://www.digitalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/2013-Report.pdf (accessed 11 November 2013).

[48] Ibid., 61.

[49] Dennis M. Murphy, "Wielding The Information Element Of Power," 156.

[50] Ibid., 154. Anonymity is built in the internet structure itself since a physical disconnection exists between user and network; the web gives the individual a voice, often an anonymous voice, and access to potentially unrestricted audiences.

[51] Lina Khatib, William Dutton, and Michael Thelwall, "Public Diplomacy 2.0: A Case Study of the US Digital Outreach Team," *Middle East Journal,* volume 66, no. 3, summer 2012, 457, http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/23842/MEJ_article.pdf (accessed 11 November 2013). In its attempt to engage with social networks over policy matters, state department officials of the Digital Outreach Team, are required to state whom they work, and genuinely identify their posts is a key strategic choice in their efforts to gain credibility.

[52] Ruogu Kang, Stephanie Brown, and Sara Kiesler, "Why Do People Seek Anonymity on the Internet? Informing Policy and Design," *Human Computer Interaction Institute* (Pittsburg, PA: Carnegie Mellon University, 2013), 4, http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~xia/resources/Documents/kang-chi13.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013). About half of the interviewees (53%) used anonymity for illegal or malicious activities such as attacking or hacking others, or they engaged in socially undesirable activities like browsing sites depicting violence or pornography.

[53] Ibid., 8.

[54] Center for the Digital Future, *The 2013 Digital Future Report*, 106, 122.

[55] Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media."

[56] Center for the Digital Future, *The 2013 Digital Future Report*, 172.

[57] Ibid., 173.

[58] Ibid., 149.

[59] John Keane, "Democracy in the Age of Google, Facebook, and Wikileaks," in *Democracy on the Precipice* ed. Council of Europe Directorate of Policy Planning (Strasbourg, Cedex: Council of Europe Publishing, September 2012), 58, http://www.coe.int/t/policy-planning/Debates/Democracy_Debates/Precipice.pdf; The Economist, "In Defense of Wikileaks," *Democracy in America*, W. W. Iowa City, 29 November 2010, http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2010/11/overseeing_state_secrecy (accessed 23 November 2013).

[60] Sergio Romano, *Morire di Democrazia* (Milano, IT: Longanesi, 2013), 47.

[61] Kristen Purcell, "Understanding the participatory news consumer," *Research for Pew Internet* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 1 March 2010), http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media/Files/Reports/2010/PIP_Understanding_the_Participatory_News_Consumer.pdf (accessed 11 November 2013).

[62] Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media." The dilemma is created by new media that increase public access to speech or assembly; with the spread of such media a state accustomed to having a monopoly on public speech finds itself called to account for anomalies between its view of events and the public's.

[63] Cheng Li and Ryan McElveen, "Can Xi's Governing Strategy Succeed?" *Current History* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 26 September 2013), http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2013/09/26-xi-jinping-china-governing-strategy-li-mcelveen (accessed 11 November 2013). Such governments are induced to prevent or disrupt such dissent movements by controlling the network or denying access tout court. Chinese officials for example, have a strong control over their national network. To some degree, they tolerate political dissent, however, they target relentlessly users' attempts coordinate and gather in protest movements. Social media have become so powerful that the Chinese authorities often shut down domestic microblogging services.

[64] James Cowie, "Can the Internet Tame Governments?" Yale Global, 9 February 2011, Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/can-internet-tame-governments-part-i (accessed 11 November 2013).

[65] Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2011), xv, http://tropicaline.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/netdelusion.pdf (accessed 11 November 2013).

[66] Joseph Nye, "The Pros and Cons of Citizen Diplomacy."

[67] Louise Vinter and David Knox, "Measuring The Impact Of Public Diplomacy: Can It Be Done?" in *Engagement: Public Diplomacy in a Globalised World,* ed. Jolyon Welsh and Daniel Fearn (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2008), 163, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/publications/Engagementpercent20book.pdf (accessed 23 November 2013).

[68] Colin M. Wilding, *Measuring the Effectiveness of Public Diplomacy: the UK Approach,* BBC World Service, (1 November 2007), 8, http://global.asc.upenn.edu/fileLibrary/PDFs/wilding.pdf, (accessed 11 November 2013).

[69] Vinter and Knox, "Measuring The Impact Of Public Diplomacy: Can It Be Done?", 168.

[70] Joseph Nye, "The Pros and Cons of Citizen Diplomacy."

[71] Center for the Digital Future, *The 2013 Digital Future Report*, 173.

[72] Bruce Gregory, "American Public Diplomacy: Enduring Characteristics, Elusive Transformation," 372.

[73] Hillary Rodham Clinton, secretary of state (Remarks on Internet Freedom, The Newseum, Washington, DC, 21 January 2010) http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135519.htm (accessed 11 November 2013).

[74] Khatib, Dutton, and Thelwall, "A Case Study of the US Digital Outreach Team," 472.

[75] Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media."

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